

Diarrhoea & Vomiting & Tummy pain in Young Children

Guidance for Patients

- Possetting (effortlessly bringing up small amounts of milk after feeding) is very common in babies and does not need any treatment.
- Reflux (bringing up larger volumes effortlessly after every feed) is also quite common, and may require treatment if excessive.
- Most children have occasional loose poos and in particular breast fed babies. However, diarrhoea is when your child's usual bowel habit changes and they frequently pass unformed, watery poos.
- A stomach bug can cause the sudden onset of large amounts of vomiting, which may be followed by diarrhoea (gastroenteritis). This is commonly due to viruses like rotavirus which are easily caught in places like playgroups or nurseries. It is usually nothing to worry about and will pass in 3-5 days, although loose poos can continue for a week or two even once the infection has gone. Gastroenteritis may also cause a fever and tummy ache, which can be helped with a dose of paracetamol. Young children in particular can become dehydrated – see [What are the signs & symptoms of dehydration?](#) below.
- Young children with sore throats & colds can sometimes have tummy ache because as well as the glands in their necks fighting the infection, glands in their tummies can 'ache in sympathy'.
- Watch out for constipation after a bout of gastroenteritis, which can happen if your child has been a bit dehydrated because of the diarrhoea and/or vomiting.
- Some children between age 1-5 years pass frequent, smelly, loose poos that may contain recognisable foods, such as carrots and peas. They are usually otherwise perfectly healthy and are growing normally. This is known as toddler diarrhoea. It does not need any treatment and usually settles after a few months.

What are the signs & symptoms of dehydration?

- Dry lips, tongue and mouth
- No tears
- Sunken eyes
- Cold hands and feet, considerable lack of energy and drowsy more than normal
- Less heavy or bone dry nappies (under one year old – no urine for six hours; one to five years old – no urine for 12 hours)
- Urine very strong and dark yellow
- In babies their soft spot on top of head (fontanelle) more sunken than normal

What to do if your child has diarrhoea & vomiting

If your child has diarrhoea and vomiting, but they are not showing the signs of dehydration, there are lots of ways you can care for them at home, for example:

- Give them frequent, regular drinks, avoiding fruit juice or squash which can cause diarrhoea
- If you are breastfeeding, carry on doing so but more often and for less time, as your baby is more likely to keep down smaller volumes of breast milk.
- If your child has been vomiting and continues to vomit, try giving smaller amounts of fluids but more often because the fluids are more likely to be kept down.
- Offer older children plenty of water, ice-lollies or oral rehydrating solution (ORS - these come in pre-measured sachets to mix with water; 1 sachet per 200mls of water – use cooled boiled water if baby is <6 months of age)
- If your child has a fever and is distressed paracetamol can help
- If your child wants to eat, give them small amounts of plain foods like pasta or boiled rice but nothing too rich or salty
- Don't give anti-diarrheal drugs, as they can be dangerous.

Seek advice from your GP or Health Visitor if your child;

- has passed 6 or more diarrheal poos or has vomited 3 times or more in the past 24 hours
- has not been able to hold down fluids for the last eight hours or you think they are dehydrated because they have possible signs or symptoms of dehydration
- is complaining of tummy pain and is having lots of wees (or pain weeing), especially if they have a fever and vomiting

Seek urgent help from your GP, 111 or A&E if your child;

- is floppy, irritable or not their usual self
- has severe tummy pain, especially if they prefer to lie still and if puffing their tummy 'out and in' causes severe pain
- has a headache, non-blanching rash (a rash that does not fade on pressing with a glass tumbler) and pain bending their neck (putting their chin on their chest)

Prevent diarrhoea & vomiting infections spreading by;

- using separate towels for your child
- everyone in the family washing their hands after using the toilet and before eating
- keeping away from others, especially children, and keeping off school/nursery until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting
- not allowing children to swim in swimming pools for two weeks after the last episode of diarrhea